

Nadler Receives Ford Foundation's Response

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Says "Ford must follow through" on Pledges to Stop Funding Anti-Semitic Groups

Washington, DC -- Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) today announced that he has received a formal response from the Ford Foundation to his inquiries regarding recent reports published by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency alleging that the philanthropic organization had funded groups that openly instigate anti-Semitism and/or attempt to de-legitimize Israel and oppose its right to exist. The Congressman, as well as the major Jewish organizations who were present at the Durban conference, were pleased with the Foundation's quick and substantive response.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency's reports focused largely on Ford grantees' actions and expressions at the 2001 United Nations Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Other Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. In an October 22, 2003 letter to the Ford Foundation, Congressman Nadler called on the philanthropic entity to review immediately its grantees' activities to ensure that organizations engaged in the promotion of anti-Semitism do not receive funding. Twenty other members of Congress signed the letter. At a November 3rd meeting between Congressman Jerrold Nadler and Ford Foundation President Susan Berresford, the Congressman urged the Foundation to take a variety of steps to better monitor groups that benefit from its funding, and to help stop the growing tide of anti-Semitism around the world. At that meeting Ms. Berresford committed to the Congressman that "The Ford Foundation will not fund groups that espouse anti-Semitism, promote violence, or deny the legitimacy of the State of Israel."

Today's formal Ford Foundation response outlines actions that the Foundation has already taken and will take in the future to ensure that its grantees do not engage in objectionable behavior, to strengthen the Foundation's ability to monitor its grantees, to reinforce its safeguards against the diversion of funds for terrorism, and to demonstrate Ford's commitment to help combat the burgeoning anti-Semitism around the world. It also includes a recognition by Ford that at least one of its grantees at the Durban Conference engaged in troubling conduct in Durban, and lacked adequate financial controls. Ford is now taking action to de-fund it. Highlights of the new initiatives include:

New language in Ford's "standard grant agreement" prohibiting both violence and terrorism, as well as bigotry and calls for the destruction of any nation-state;

A new KPMG-developed "risk matrix" to enhance grantee financial accountability. This risk matrix, which will automatically trigger an audit when certain financial accounting factors warrant, will be piloted in the Middle East and then used by Ford around the world;

A further review, in consultation with key American Jewish community organizations and others, of Ford grantees' actions at Durban;

The termination of funding of one of Ford's Durban grantees: the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW);

A commitment to address the alarming rise of anti-Semitism via "significant regional and global program actions, particularly in the areas of human rights, anti-racism, and tolerance-building."

Upon receiving the Ford Foundation's response to his concerns, Nadler stated, "As is undeniably clear from this just past weekend's horrific attacks in Turkey, anti-Semitism is on the rise worldwide. It comes in a variety of forms, including

traditional bigotry and violence, as well as new, pernicious approaches such as rhetorical attempts to undermine the moral legitimacy of Israel's right to exist."

Nadler continued, "Today's response by the Ford Foundation's leadership outlines a set of important and concrete steps they are voluntarily taking to strengthen oversight of grantees and to utilize the Foundation's considerable international reach and standing to assist in combating global anti-Semitism. I am pleased that the Ford Foundation has responded swiftly and substantively to the concerns I laid out in my letter, and in my meeting with Ms. Berresford. That the organization is willing to take serious and transparent steps to admit and correct past wrongs, and to create mechanisms to prevent bigoted or violent groups from becoming beneficiaries of the Ford Foundation's goodwill in the future, is highly commendable. I am extremely pleased that the Foundation will be a new partner in efforts to stem the growing tide of anti-Semitism, and I am hopeful that Ford's actions will serve as a model for other US philanthropic institutions that do work around the world.

"I have been impressed by the efforts of Ford's leadership to reach out to some of the key leaders in American Jewish community throughout this process. I expect that the growing relationships that Ford's leadership has built, during this time, with the American Jewish community will mark a critical new chapter in the fight against anti-Semitism and de-legitimization of Israel's right to exist. There is obviously much work ahead for both Ford and the Jewish community. And, of course, I have been utterly clear with the leadership of the Ford Foundation that they must follow-through with each and every one of the pledges and commitments they have made today. As we know, actions, not words, will be what count in the end," said Nadler.

Both Congressman Nadler and the Ford Foundation worked, throughout this process, with some of the key American Jewish organizations who were represented at the Durban Conference and were witness to and victims of the deeply troubling activity there. Of those organizations' contribution, Rep. Nadler said, "I am deeply grateful for the critical consultation and advice provided by these important organizations in this process. Their assistance and insight has been invaluable."

The major American Jewish community organizations that were in attendance at the Durban conference, responded to today's letter with the following comments:

Abraham Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League said, "We welcome Ford's renunciation of the anti-Semitism and de-legitimization of Israel at Durban in which some of their grantees were involved. The Durban conference reminded us that that, even today, even under the rubric of tolerance, anti-Jewish and anti-Israel bias is a potent force that, unchecked, leads to the kind of broad vilification of Jews and the Jewish State that we saw in Durban.

"The Ford Foundation has demonstrated courage and conscience in recognizing that foundations can and must take responsibility to see to it that they are not funding incitement. They have used this as an opportunity to deepen their understanding of anti-Semitism and look for ways to counteract and prevent it.

"We commend Ms. Berresford for understanding that, just as we call on political and community leaders to take a moral stand against hatred and bigotry, supporters of civil society organizations have a vital role to play in fostering a climate of tolerance and setting standards for fair and equal judgment of all sovereign states. Ms. Berresford and the Foundation have charted a course we hope others will follow and we look forward to working with them to follow up on these commitments."

David Harris, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), said, "AJC commends the Ford Foundation's commitment today to confront seriously the enabling environment for hate and anti-Semitism at home and abroad. We welcome the frank acknowledgement that some of Ford's grantees, at a human rights conference, were abridging the very principles they commit themselves to uphold by promoting or failing to condemn

hate, violence and de-legitimization . We hope that Ford's actions today will serve as a model for other donor institutions. This is one step in the right direction, and a significant one at that."

Hannah Rosenthal, Executive Director of the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, said, "The Ford Foundation has taken a meaningful step to acknowledge the 'unacceptable behavior' of some of its grantees in response to inquiries by Congressman Nadler and his colleagues. We appreciated the foundation's candor when we met, and on behalf of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, I look forward to Ford's promised further inquiry of their Durban grantees, regarding their actions and statements at the 2001 conference. We urge all foundations and human rights agencies to follow Ford's lead and we anticipate continuing to work with the foundation as they fulfill their pledge to take on new initiatives to combat racism, bigotry and anti-Semitism. We are grateful for Congressman Nadler's diligent work and we welcome the Ford Foundation as an ally in our world-wide battle against anti-Semitism."

Judith Palkovitz, National Secretary of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, said, "We applaud the Ford Foundation's efforts and hope that their initiatives planned to ensure a code of responsible behavior by their grantees will set new standards for funding social action in the non-profit sector. Having participated in the Durban conference and having been subject to the vicious, bigoted actions of a number of those present, we are especially encouraged that Ford will begin funding programs to address the alarming rise in anti-Semitism around the world. We look forward to working with them."

Daniel S. Mariaschin, Executive Vice President of B'nai Brith International, said, "We commend Congressman Nadler on his assertive leadership on this issue. We welcome the Ford Foundation's response and see this as a turning point in a more dynamic and involved assessment process for the funding of NGOs. We hope this will end the anti-Israel diatribe so prevalent during Durban. We call on other foundations to follow the Ford Foundation's re-evaluation process when funding NGOs."

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